

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Fernando Ricardo Valenzuela. I'm a Hartford resident and a graduate student at UConn's School of Social Work.

I stand in support of **HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status**. Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. Furthermore, and especially considering that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take over 400 lives a day, we have a moral obligation to protect the health and well-being of every member in our society regardless of their immigration status—and that starts by passing HB 6616.

Although I am currently insured, I have experienced periods of time throughout my life in which I was underinsured or lacked health insurance entirely, including during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was fortunate enough to not need any serious medical attention, but the fear and anxiety of needing such a vital service that I knew I couldn't afford was always there. There are immigrant community members all across Connecticut who are currently living with the fear and anxiety that they cannot afford healthcare services. Those with medical conditions—many of whom are children currently not covered by last year's expansion of HUSKY—are not getting the help they deserve because they cannot afford it. I know this because I have worked with these communities and even helped translate some of the testimonies you will be hearing/have heard today.

If we want to demonstrate that we as a State truly care about the health and well-being of all of our community members, then we must pass HB 6616. We can not proclaim to incoming immigrants that this is the land of opportunity if we do not give them the *opportunity* to have access to life saving and life-enhancing health insurance; we cannot proclaim that this is the land of freedom if undocumented immigrants do not have the *freedom* to receive the healthcare services that they deserve. We can not proclaim to uphold any American values unless they are extended to the undocumented immigrant communities who deserve to have their human rights defended and protected just as much as anyone else.

Anything short of a full expansion of HUSKY to all residents regardless of immigration status is telling those who are systematically excluded that we are not interested in protecting their right to a healthy life. How much longer will we wait to include everyone? How many more lines will you draw to differentiate between those who are worthy of access and those who are not?

I am in support of HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation.

Thank you for your time,
Fernando Ricardo Valenzuela